

contributing outright aid of more than \$200 million a year, and was currently negotiating a new Algerian oil deal with Ben Bella.

The Puzzles. Close friends of Boumedienne have always insisted that he is without political ambitions. It is possible that he will govern through a collegium of Algerian leaders or, as in so many Arab lands, through an administration of army officers. The French claim that Boumedienne received his military training in Moscow and Peking, but in foreign affairs he is unlikely to be more Communist-oriented than was Ben Bella. In fact, one of the many puzzling elements about the coup is that the political views of Boumedienne and Ben Bella were, until last week, considered identical.

As for the Algerian people, they received the news of Ben Bella's fall with apathy. Men gathered in cafés to sip thick coffee and mint tea; stores and shops opened for business as usual. By afternoon, soldiers with submachine guns had turned back to the city's police the job of directing traffic, and Algiers dozed beneath a cloudless sky and enervating heat.

At sundown a crowd came briefly to life as people scrambled for the evening papers, which merely reprinted the communiqué broadcast by Radio Algiers. Some Western observers optimistically recalled that Boumedienne's Defense Ministry had been one of the few well-run departments of the Algerian government and thought that might augur well for the future. The only fact that had become really clear was that Houari Boumedienne, so long known as "Numéro un bis" in Algeria, had at last become "Numéro un."

SOUTH VIET NAM

Bombsight & Hindsight

At the O.K. Corral

In Viet Nam's vicious war, the U.S. has employed just about every weapon in the book, from bowie knives to bombs that hurl darts, in an attempt to wipe out the Viet Cong guerrillas. But few expected to see the weapon that was called in last week. It was the B-52 Stratofortress, that eight-jet colossus of the Strategic Air Command whose normal function is toting H-bombs round the world in constant cold war vigilance against attack on the U.S. On this mission, the Stratoforts—30 of them—carried conventional bombs and the seeds of a quite unconventional controversy. For their target was one against which most airmen would never think of employing strategic bombers.

Lyndon Said Go. The big bombers' target was "the O.K. Corral,"* a desolate 1-by-2-mi. patch of wilderness just 33 miles north of Saigon. There,

* Named by U.S. officers for the scene of the Old West's most famous gunfight, the livery stable in Tombstone, Ariz., where Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday gunned down three badmen in 1881.

cording to intelligence reports, as many as four Viet Cong battalions were massing in the dense thicket near Bencat for another devastating attack on government positions along Route 14, a mere 30 miles north of Saigon. In the hope of avoiding a disaster like the one fortnight ago at nearby Dongxoai (rhymes with wrong's why), U.S. planners in Saigon searched for a means to trap the concealed Communist troops by surprise in their jungle hide-out. SAC had long been restless to get into the war, and General William C. Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in South Viet Nam, gave SAC its wish. The big bombers would unroll a carpet of destruction, carefully tacked down by radar-controlled bombsights guaranteed to produce pinpoint accuracy. The plan was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by the Pentagon, and then forwarded to the White House. Lyndon Johnson said go.

The Stratoforts swept in at 15,000 ft. from their base on Guam, 2,600 miles away. En route, two of the \$8,000,000 planes collided while refueling off the Philippines, and over the target area another plane was unable to release its bombload because of a mechanical failure. The remaining bombers unloaded a torrent of high explosives—270 tons in all—on the tangled forest floor. Then they wheeled for home, confident that they had dispersed the Viet Cong and killed many. But had they?

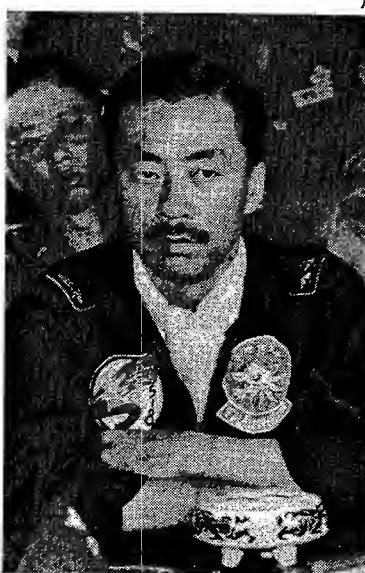
Buffalo & Teakettles. Not according to the three teams of U.S. and South Vietnamese Special Forces who heli-copterred into the area to evaluate damage. The searchers found that many bombs had fallen as much as 250 yards apart, and much of the force of the explosions had been absorbed by the dense forest growth. Water buffalo grazed peacefully in fields where the 750-lb. and 1,000-lb. blockbusters had hit. Not a single Viet Cong body was found, although the searchers drew steady sniper fire, showing that Communists were still in the area. In an abandoned cave, the searchers found Viet Cong communications equipment and teakettles still warm to the touch. This led Washington officials to claim that the mission had been a success: the bombers had forced the Viet Cong to break and run. More skeptical officers looked at it another way: the bombing raid had been so ineffective that it had not even tipped over the teapots.

In hindsight, use of the B-52s had been an expensive means of hunting guerrillas, and the scheme's only real merit may well have been psychological. Hanoi could hardly fail to notice how quickly and easily SAC's huge squadrons had been brought into the Viet Nam battle. The B-52s would, of course, be enormously effective if turned onto the cities or factories of the north. But the jungle strike also served to prove once again that the war in South Viet Nam can be won only by foot soldiers,

closely supported by tactical air strikes.

Also, the cost of ground war is high. Last week Saigon revised its casualty totals for the bloody battle of Dongxoai. The toll: more than 700 government troops and 150 civilians dead v. an estimated 700 Viet Cong. But Saigon's new military leaders seemed ready and willing to keep up the grim ground battle. To buttress their fighting force, 600 U.S. paratroopers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade were now holding a vital flank of Route 14, at the same time guarding the airstrip at Phuocvinh, a few miles from Bencat and Dongxoai.

Among the riflemen were lots of would-be Wyatt Earps, backed up by 300 impatient gunners of a U.S. artillery battalion. But so far, there was not a sign that the Viet Cong would test their perimeter, and through the long, hot days the troops were getting bored. As a precaution they were digging their foxholes a little bit deeper. As one paratrooper put it: "The longer we stay here, the more of a target we become."



PREMIER KY
Coffin on order.

Toward a Stern Life

The dull thump of bombs in the O.K. Corral was audible in Saigon, but the capital was not listening. Its attention was focused on the installation of yet another new government. Black limousines loaded with generals swept through the city escorted by Jeeps mounting .50-cal. machine guns. An honor guard stood tautly and intermittently in the hot sun outside stately Dienhong Mansion as a brass band blared the national anthem. The scene was far too familiar, a piece of political theater played to a skeptical and somewhat jaundiced audience and by no means sure of a long run. Yet some of the script was new.

Reforms & Reprisals. South Viet Nam's latest Premier is Air Force Commander Nguyen Cao Ky, 34, a hard-

bitten, mustachioed aviator who affects a black flight suit, a lavender ascot, and a pearl-handled revolver. But his flamboyance is outdone by his frankness. In his first speech, Ky (pronounced key) laid it on the line: The country, he said, was suffering from "internal decay, intellectual stagnation and inflation." In many rural areas, the national administration has collapsed; indeed, the government announced that nothing but airmail could now be delivered to the five Communist-infested provinces of the Central Highlands. "I am just a pilot," Ky continued, "and as a pilot I don't like politics. But the generals have picked me because they have confidence in me. They picked me more to risk my life than as an honor."

On that grim note, Ky proposed his remedy for South Viet Nam's malaise: a program of reform, mobilization and austerity more radical and detailed than any offered by previous regimes. Ky promised to eliminate "speculators, profiteers and black-marketeers," and threatened the top 28 rice dealers, who have been artificially hiking prices for profit, that lots would be drawn to decide which would be shot if they did not cut prices.

The new government would put stringent price controls on all basic consumer goods, demand "contributions" from the rich to help pay for the war effort, slap heavier taxes on luxury items. He also had an eye out for the troops. To bolster military morale, Ky planned substantial increases in soldiers' pensions, a crackdown on draft dodgers, and the immediate recall of students taking courses abroad. All of this sounded absolutely horrifying to Saigon's smart set, but it was a step toward a sterner life that was long overdue in the lackadaisical capital.

Caution & the Cabinet. Ky's 16-man "War Cabinet," which is responsible to the military-controlled National Leadership Committee headed by Major General Nguyen Van Thieu, is carefully balanced along religious and regional lines. Six members are holdovers from the civilian regime of Dr. Phan Huy Quat, who last week retired from politics to return to hospital work. Only three Cabinet members are military men.

Militant Catholics and Buddhists—the main threat to any Saigon regime—were skeptical about Ky's chances of survival, but seemed willing to give him a chance. U.S. officials cautioned privately that Ky was too young and impulsive to endure for long in the volatile world of Saigon politics. Ky himself was aware of the dangers that plague anyone in that sphere. "I have told my wife to buy me a coffin," he remarked to reporters. "But as soon as I fall, another member of the team will replace me. There is no question of the government's falling apart as in the past."



BRITAIN'S WILSON & GHANA'S NKRUMAH
First, out with Australia's 900.

THE COMMONWEALTH

Foggy Day in Londontown

Among the gilt mirrors and airy hangings of Marlborough House, it seemed a wizard idea: Something should be done about Viet Nam. The 21 delegations gathered in London last week for the 14th Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference overwhelmingly approved the notion. But in the execution, it proved a bit more complex. The plan was to send a five-nation team, headed by Britain's Prime Minister Harold Wilson, to Hanoi, Saigon, Peking, Moscow and Washington to seek a way to end the war. The team's spread of political ideologies, ranging from the demagogic leftism of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah through the balanced anti-Communism of Nigeria's Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, would seem to guarantee the group a hearing in every capital. After all, the argument ran, the Commonwealth speaks for a quarter of the world's population, hence represents a microcosm of world opinion.

But no sooner had Wilson gavelled the motion into debate than a fog of dissent sprang up around it. Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere, recent host to Peking's Premier Chou En-lai, complained that the idea unfairly "put China in the dock," adding that "if Hanoi refuses to see the committee, the whole thing will be a blow to the Commonwealth." Pakistan's President Mohammed Ayub Khan argued that Wilson also should not be a member. Ayub's reason: Britain is too deeply committed to the U.S. to join a truly "nonaligned" peace initiative. Malaysia's Tunku Abdul Rahman—recipient of British arms and advice in his battle with Indonesia—feared that the team might "reward aggression" in Southeast Asia.

Nkrumah said he'd be delighted to

go, but demanded that Commonwealth-member Australia first withdraw her 900 troops from South Viet Nam. Even Moscow got into the act with an *Izvestia* editorial that took the Commonwealth to task for a lack of "clarity." After all, the Russians sniffed, how can a fact-finding committee be truly impartial if it doesn't even condemn the U.S. in advance? "There is no demand [in the proposal] to withdraw American troops from Viet Nam," chided *Izvestia*, "nor to stop the barbarian bombardments of North Viet Nam."

Though Wilson's scheme had the backing of the U.S. and at least tacit support from 16 Commonwealth members, there was more than a little doubt that the mission would get under way next month as Wilson hoped. Even if the Russians ultimately agree to the team's visit, Peking and Hanoi probably will not. Last April, when Wilson's emissary, Patrick Gordon Walker, set off on a similar mission, they would not even receive him.

EUROPE

1815 & All That

What is history but a fable agreed upon?

—Napoleon Bonaparte

It was the sort of pomp and circumstance that Britons do so awfully well. In Whitehall's Inigo Jones Banqueting Hall, Queen Elizabeth II last week dined formally with 250 guests off the regimental silver of the 35 regiments that, with Marshal Blücher's Prussians, defeated Napoleon at Waterloo. Afterward Defense Minister Denis Healey and the ambassadors of The Netherlands, Belgium and West Germany watched 1,200 soldiers from those regiments march under floodlights.

Conspicuously absent was the French